



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Bay Area Women in Creative Music

Ouzounian, G. (2009). Bay Area Women in Creative Music. *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 13, 106-108.

Published in:

Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

musical performances of witches and the mad have further conveyed their mental and social disorder? Scripts rarely provide specific details of a character's appearance, gestures, declamation, and manner of musical performance, but documentary evidence from personal diaries, medical records, ballad lyrics, and treatises describing witches and the behavior of the mad can provide clues that might help illuminate the visual elements of these characters' dramatic musical performances.⁹

9. For example, Thomas Wright's treatise on the passions includes physical descriptions of common theatrical emotions: "In anger and fear we see men either extreme pale or highly coloured; in melancholy and sadness the eyes are heavy; in joy and pleasure the motions of the eyes are lively and pleasant" (*The Passions of the Mind in General*, ed. William Webster Newbold [New York: Garland Publishers, 1986], 109). In his popular treatise on melancholy Robert Burton describes extremely mad patients with the following: "If they be far gone, mimical gestures are too familiar, laughing, grinning, fleering, murmuring, talking to themselves, with strange mouths and faces, inarticulate voices, [and] exclamations" (*The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1651), 6th ed., ed. Lawrence Babb [East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1965], 72).

To conclude, I return to the opening theme of disorder. In keeping with the instability of the seventeenth-century English stage, Amanda Eubanks Winkler refuses to bind her subversive characters in neat packages. I find her observations of negotiated trends, which do not always fit into tidy theoretical boxes, honest conclusions of an extremely complex period of English cultural life. Perhaps embracing the turmoil of their time, English audiences across the seventeenth century were particularly entertained by the spectacle of onstage disorder and continually returned to the theater to see additional witches, lovesick heroines, and melancholic heroes flaunt political, religious, and social conventions in riotous song and dance. Whether onstage or within Winkler's text, these unruly characters refuse to be absolutely contained. To quote a favorite and most applicable phrase from *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note: Music for Witches, the Melancholic, and the Mad on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage*: "Disorder, once introduced, proves difficult to control" (149).

Bay Area Women in Creative Music (<http://music.mills.edu/bawcm/>).

Web site maintained by Mills College, Oakland, CA.

GASCIA OUZOUNIAN

In 1997, when the Internet was still in its infancy, American composer and educator Pauline Oliveros invited students in her Women in Creative Music class at Mills College to create a Web site that would document the increasing visibility and vitality of local women musicians.¹ The resulting Web site, Bay Area Women in Creative Music, should be considered a pioneering effort, and it remains an important, dynamic resource today. More crucially, the Web site serves as a model for other communities, acting

as a kind of virtual call to arms for musicians and scholars who wish to support the work of women musicians in the global arena.

Bay Area Women in Creative Music is constructed as a list: it compiles, in alphabetical order, the names of women musicians ("composers, songwriters, improvisers, and sound artists") who work in the Bay Area. Each name links to either the personal Web site of its owner or a page about her—comprising interviews, biographies, discographies, and other resources—created by one of Oliveros's students.² Following

1. Oliveros serves on the faculties of both Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York and Mills College in the Bay Area; she teaches Women in Creative Music at Mills College via telepresence.

2. Currently, there are a number of missing and broken links in Bay Area Women in Creative Music, but Oliveros's students will be updating the Web site this year.

this initial list of names are two additional lists. The first of these, "Internet Resources for Composers," links visitors to the Web sites of organizations that support music by women. These include New York Women Composers (a networking organization that supports performances and recordings of music by its members) and Hildegard Publishing Company (a publishing house that exclusively publishes music by women and that features an extensive, impressive catalog).³ The next list, "Email Resources," connects visitors to the inboxes of representatives from these and similar organizations, like the International Alliance for Women in Music (a group that hosts annual congresses, competitions, and festivals of music by women). This third and final list also links to individual, institutionally unaffiliated women who support other women musicians.

In her introduction to the site Oliveros writes: "If you are a Bay Area woman in creative music not listed here please send your name and information. . . . You will be welcomed to the list as it is updated." The nondiscriminating ethos of Bay Area Women in Creative Music is possibly the site's most salient feature. The musicians it lists work in genres that range from "queer homophop punkrock" (Lynn Breedlove) and "Klezmer Punk Balkan Funk" (Jewlia Eisenberg) to "neo-romantic, avant-garde music, text-sound works, and musical theater" (Beth Anderson) and "jazz, western classical music, traditional Japanese music and free improvisation" (Miya Masaoka).⁴ One member identifies herself as a "poet/guitarist/singer-songwriter" (Marina Lazzara), while another is a "noisician" (C. J. "Reaven" Borosque); one is described as "an avant-pop, chamber punk trailblazer" (Madigan Shive), while still another is dubbed, somewhat improbably, "a one-woman musical hur-

ricane" (Amy X Neuburg).⁵ Between them they span three generations and belong to a diverse group of ethnic, cultural, political, social, and religious-spiritual communities.

In spite of this diversity there are striking threads that link these musicians' stories: many received their initial musical education from a female relative or female teacher; many report a sense of alienation or marginalization (deriving from gender) in their subsequent formal or institutional training; many cite the lack of women composers in the academy as a determining factor in their professional development; many seek out and rely upon professional solidarity with their female peers. The composer Beth Anderson, who produces the annual concert series *Women's Work*, recalls:

Regarding my childhood, my grandmother could play by ear and she loved to hear me practice and would say after every piece, "That was pretty. Play that one again." She was a booster. I had two women piano teachers who encouraged me to compose—Margie Murphy and Helen Lipscomb. Helen was also a composer and we used part of my lessons for composition.⁶

The fact that Anderson received her early musical training and key encouragement from women is typical; that she received her formal training in composition only from men (John Cage, Robert Ashley, and Terry Riley were among her teachers) is also typical.

In her interview with the Bay Area composer Cindy A. Cox, Jena A. Spurgeon (*Women in Creative Music* class of '99) reports:

As a woman composer, Cox has experienced some discrimination, although she does not feel that it was overt. During her graduate studies

3. See New York Women Composers, <http://www.newyorkwomencomposers.org/> and the Hildegard Publishing Company, <http://www.hildegard.com/>.

4. See Beth Anderson, <http://www.beand.com/>; Miya Masaoka, <http://www.miyamasaoka.com/>; Lynn Breedlove, <http://www.lynnbreedlove.com/>; and Jewlia Eisenberg, <http://charminghostess.us/>.

5. See Marina Lazzara, http://www.paxrecordings.com/Artists/Marina_Lazzara.html; C. J. "Reaven" Borosque, <http://www.edgetonerecords.com/borosque.html>; Madigan Shive, <http://www.bonfiremadigan.com/>; and Amy X Neuburg, <http://amyxneuburg.com/>.

6. See Beth Anderson, <http://www.beand.com/>.

Ms. Cox was the only female graduate student in music. Quite frequently her teachers were male and because of this she felt a “sense of isolation.” Ms. Cox likened her struggles as a woman composer to the issues that women face everyday in society, but stated further that the problems she faced were, “sometimes harder, because there are so few female composers.”

Spurgeon continues that Cox, an associate professor in the Department of Music at UC Berkeley (where she is the only woman out of eight composers on the faculty), “works to bring more female composers into the composing program, and most importantly to make them feel, while in the program, that they are not ‘isolated.’”⁷

Beyond its value as a scholarly resource, Bay Area Women in Creative Music is perhaps most effective in opening a window onto and confronting the isolation that is particular to women who create music. Like any other list, it derives its power from numbers. As of this writing there are over two hundred women and over thirty organizations and resources featured on the list. These numbers contrast sharply with other, more familiar numbers: that Cox is the only woman out of eight serving on a major university’s composition faculty is not so bad when you consider that Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, the Juilliard School, McGill University, Stanford University, UC Irvine, UCLA, UC Riverside, the University of Florida, the University of Texas at Austin, the

University of Toronto, Wesleyan University, and York University collectively employ a total number of *zero* female composers on their permanent faculties.⁸

Like the biographies of its members, the numbers belonging to Bay Area Women in Creative Music also tell a story, namely, that there exist extensive communities of women who create music and people who support them, despite the pervasive lack of such support on the part of our most valued academic institutions. More fundamentally, these numbers communicate the critical, persistent need to increase the visibility of creative women musicians in the public sphere, especially in the academy. One can imagine the list easily expanding, birthing other lists, evolving into a women’s music equivalent of a Facebook-meets-Craigslist kind of enterprise: a collectively maintained, global networking resource with local chapters that connects, documents, and gives a public face to the myriad vibrant communities of women who create music. One could also imagine the numbers belonging to such a global list spilling over from virtual into actual worlds, exploding the notion that there are “few female composers,” and forcing public institutions to reckon with their own lists and their own numbers. As Oliveros writes, “If you are not listed here, please send your name and information.”

7. See Jena N. Spurgeon, interview with Cindy A. Cox, January 1999, <http://music.mills.edu/bawcm/mus16.CindyCox.html>.

8. Carnegie Mellon University, the Curtis Institute, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the New England Conservatory, Princeton University, UC Davis, UC San Diego, and Yale University do not fare much better in this regard; none employs more than a single female composer on its permanent faculty.